



Vickie Lewis Democrat and Chronicle

The shark found at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay, now dead and on display

## Dying shark pulled from mouth of bay

Conservation officer blames prankster for dumping it

By Laura Meade

Democrat and Chronicle

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the lake — a shark is snagged at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay.

It wasn't a great white shark like the one in the movie *Jaws*, and it wasn't even a threat to people, said Chuck Yaekel, an environmental conservation officer. It was "belly up and dying" when fisherman Jimmy Russo hooked it Tuesday morning, Yaekel said.

The 42-inch shark apparently was brought to the lake by a boating prankster and left to die, Yaekel said. Sharks are salt-water fish and can only live for

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## 'Belly-up' shark pulled from mouth of Irondequoit Bay

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about 10 hours in fresh water.

The fish was barely alive when Russo of 188 Northland Ave. spotted it at 6:30 a.m. Tuesday. It's now dead and on display at S&R Bait and Tackle, 4423 Culver Road.

"I was fishing in the outlet and I saw this thing on the side of the water by a rock, and I kept lookin' and lookin'. At first I thought it was a catfish, because its color was the same. But it was a shark," Russo said.

It had a hook in its mouth — "You don't reach in a shark's mouth to take the hook out," Yaekel said — but was alive and bleeding from its gills. Russo towed it ashore and turned it over to the S&R Bait and Tackle Shop, asking that the game warden be called.

"A cop came by, and he started laughing," Russo said. "He didn't believe it. I didn't believe it either."

"At first I thought it was a sturgeon," said Ron Gatz, co-owner of the tackle shop. "But I'd have to say it was a shark."

Yaekel said it was either a full-grown sand shark or a small blue shark.

It's not the first time a shark has been found in Lake Ontario. About five years ago, a 7-foot shark washed up at the Fairhaven Beach State Park, and there has been at least one other incident over the years, Yaekel said.

Yaekel said a fisherman probably hooked the shark that Russo found during a trip to the ocean and figured it would be fun to bring it back to the lake. Most ocean-going boats have bait wells filled with salt water, where the shark

could have been kept alive during the trip to the lake, Yaekel said.

Bill King, a conservation officer, said releasing any fish or fish eggs into state waters without a permit is a violation of state law punishable by as much as a \$250 fine and 15 days in jail. "It's also not a smart thing to do," he said.

Gatz said he has the shark on ice now and isn't sure what he'll do with it. It has become a joke of sorts among local fishermen and workers in the state Department of Environmental Conservation office.

Yaekel joked with marine biologists in his office, "I'm gonna tell everyone you guys put it into the lake to control the salmon population."

The people in the salmon stocking program weren't amused.